Supreme Court, U.S.
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No. 94-430

In the Supreme Court of the United States

OCTOBER TERM, 1994

ROSS D. BIRD, PETITIONER

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE ARMED FORCES

BRIEF FOR THE UNITED STATES IN OPPOSITION

DREW S. DAYS, III
Solicitor General
Department of Justice
Washington, D.C. 20530
(202) 514-2217

JOSEPH COMPOSTO
Colonel, USMC

BRIAN B. RIPPEL
Lieutenant, U.S. Naval Reserve
Appellate Government Counsel
Appellate Government Division
Navy-Marine Corps Appellate Review Activity-JAG
Washington, D.C. 20374-1111

QUESTION PRESENTED

Whether the Judge Advocate General's role in preparing fitness reports for military officers who serve as judges on the courts of military review undermines the independence of those judges and renders petitioner's convictions invalid under the Due Process Clause.

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OPINIONS BELOW

Most of the 92 individual decisions of the Court of Military Appeals in these consolidated cases (Pet. App. 135a-270a) are unreported.

JURISDICTION

The decisions of the Court of Military Appeals were rendered between June 13, 1994, and August 2, 1994. A consolidated petition for a writ of certiorari was filed on September 9, 1994. The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U.S.C. 1259(3) (Supp. V 1993).

STATEMENT

The Judge Advocate General of the Navy is the principal legal officer for that military service. He assigns other commissioned officers to serve as judges of the Navy-Marine Corps Court of Military Review. In accordance with Department of the Navy regulations, he also submits fitness or efficiency reports respecting those officers. Navy regulations require preparation of fitness reports for all of the Navy's commissioned officers. The reports describe an officer's performance and conduct during the reporting period and form a basis for determining his retention, promotion, and future assignments. A typical report consists of a checklist evaluation in several key areas of performance, a narrative summary of the officer's accomplishments during the reporting period, and a comparative ranking with other officers of the same pay grade in the same organization. Pet. App. 5a-7a.

Petitioners are service members from the Navy and Marine Corps who were convicted of various offenses. They contend that the Judge Advocate General's role in preparing fitness reports for military officers who serve as judges on the courts of military review undermines the independence of those judges and renders petitioners' convictions invalid under the Due Process Clause. The United States Court of Military Appeals (now named the United States Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces) rejected those challenges on the basis of its previous decision in *United States* v. *Mitchell*, 39 M.J. 131, cert.

denied, 15 S. Ct. 200 (1994) (94-174), which specifically addressed the question.[1]

ARGUMENT

As we explained in our brief in opposition to the petition for a writ of certiorari in *United States* v. *Mitchell*, *supra*, the Court of Military Appeals correctly concluded that the Judge Advocate General's role in preparing fitness reports for military officers who serve as judges on the courts of military review does not offend due process.[2] The Court of Military Appeals' ruling in *Mitchell* is consistent with this Court's recent decision in *Weiss* v. *United States*, 114 S. Ct. 752 (1994), does not conflict with any decision of this Court or another court of appeals, and does not otherwise warrant review. The decisions consolidated in this petition simply follow the Court of Military Appeals' decision in *Mitchell* and do not provide any additional basis for this Court's examination.

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[1] As petitioners acknowledge, two of the petitioners—Bledsoe and Jones—did not raise this issue before the Court of Military Appeals. Pet. 5-7.

[2] We are providing counsel in this case with a copy of our brief in opposition in *Mitchell*.

CONCLUSION

The petition for a writ of certiorari should be denied.

Respectfully submitted.

DREW S. DAYS, III
Solicitor General

JOSEPH COMPOSTO
Colonel, USMC

BRIAN B. RIPPEL
Lieutenant, U.S. Naval Reserve
Appellate Government Counsel
Appellate Government Division
Navy-Marine Corps Appellate Review Activity-JAG

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